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ABSTRACT

The Urban Career Education Center (UCEC) is an alternative experimental high school for students classified as potential dropouts. It began operating in 1972 founded on the premise that the real goal of a worthwhile education should be the preparation of students for a productive and satisfying life in their chosen careers. The UCEC model includes close interaction with and utilization of educational, industrial, business, and other community resources to insure that students gain the proper tools for acquiring marketable career skills. The program is divided into three phases. The major thrust of Phase 1 is orienting students to UCEC, diagnosing student strengths and potential problems in academic and personal areas, and exposing students to a variety of career information. Phase 2 includes basic classroom instructional activities and career exploratory ("hands-on") field experiences. Phase 3 deals primarily with advanced or specialized experiences for students in their career interests. From an analysis of student records it was concluded that while most of these students were low achievers at their former schools, they showed a high level of academic and personal growth at UCEC. (TA)

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EXPLORATORY EDUCATION: A CAREER MODEL

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The notion that young people must become more knowledgeable about the world of work, their career interests and those learning experiences which are needed to achieve a career goal, can be observed by the increasing desire of educators to have career knowledge injected into the regular school curriculum. Numerous career educational programs have been launched in various cities and more are being planned. Some of these programs emphasize the updating of school curricula with career content, while others are designed to offer young people a wider exposure to career and vocational experiences. These programs have presented the following features:

- Increased career guidance counseling
- Career centered curricula
- Use of industry and business as resources
- Establishment of special skill centers
- Use of Saturdays for career activities
- Inclusion of parents in educational process
- Career exposure for elementary children
- Use of career specialists in school program

Many of the career educational programs have provided specific services for students, however few appear able to treat and motivate the total needs of students successfully toward a career choice. It seems that students who learn about careers are not given practical simulated and field experiences, and therefore achieve only partial knowledge about a particular vocation. The same factor relates to class-

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room academic learning, i.e. unless conceptual learning is connected to practical applications students usually see little relevance in the learning they have acquired. There also must be frequent opportunities for counselors to give students the kind of reinforcement and guidance that will help them to develop and utilize all of their skills and capabilities in a productive way. Therefore career educational programs must provide opportunities for students not only to learn about various careers, but also to see themselves in a career situation.

For students who are identified as educationally and socially deprived these problems are increasingly dramatic and serious. These students have environmental and family barriers that severely affect their educational performance. In many instances state and federal projects have been established to alleviate these negative influences and forces, but still an alarming number of young people arrive and graduate from senior high school reading at an elementary level, knowing nothing about careers, having no personal confidence or motivation and lacking knowledge about problem-solving. These youths feel and act like worthless members of our society.

Our deprived youth therefore tend to release their energies in non-acceptable ways such as gang violence, drug use and other destructive activities. There is a need for these young people to become aware of their skills, abilities and potentials.

URBAN CAREER EDUCATION CENTER (UCEC) CONCEPT

During the Seventh Annual Convention of the Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America (OIC/A) held in February of 1971, in Seattle, Washington an idea was born regarding an innovate design for career education. The idea was conceived by Dr. Leon Sullivan, Founder and Chairman of OIC/A and Dr. Sidney

Marland, then United States Commissioner of Education. These two leaders met to discuss and analyze the problems of America's unskilled and unemployed young people. Dr. Sullivan had worked on this problem through OIC since its inception.

The success of OIC in training and placing people in productive jobs led Dr. Sullivan to conceptualize an innovative idea in education based on a design of marrying the forces of industry and education. The main thrust of this idea was that education must be practical and useful if young people are to be productive in the careers they pursue. This conceptual planning led to the creation and launching of the Urban Career Education Center, an innovation experimental career project that provides opportunities for young people to explore their interests and opportunities.

The Urban Career Education Center (UCEC) is an alternative experimental high school which began operating in 1972. The center is located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and operates outside the traditional school district structure. UCEC is funded by the National Institute of Education and is operated by OIC in cooperation with the Philadelphia School District.

UCEC presents alternative educational experiences for students which allow them to participate in the decision-making processes that determine their learning and career activities. In order to achieve the necessary knowledge and skills for the world of work students at UCEC are:

1. *Involved with curricula that intergrates careers with academic content.*
2. *Exposed to career exploration.*
3. *Given on-the-job training.*

The core staff at UCEC - instructors, counseling, and job developers, play a vital role in assisting students to identify their interests, potentials, abilities and needs.[1]

UCEC was founded on the premise that the real goal of a worthwhile education should be the preparation of students for a productive and satisfying life in their chosen careers. Further, for education to be useful it must be applicable and practial in society.

Since the total family unit greatly influences the career aspirations and progress of students, UCEC insists on active parental involvement in an effort to build necessary positive and supportive forces that will enhance the achievement of students. Finally, the UCEC model includes close interaction with and utilization of educational, industrial, business and other community resources to insure that students gain the proper tools for acquiring marketable career skills.

1 *See Exhibit A for Systems Interaction Model*

Urban Career Education Center

Systems Interaction Model

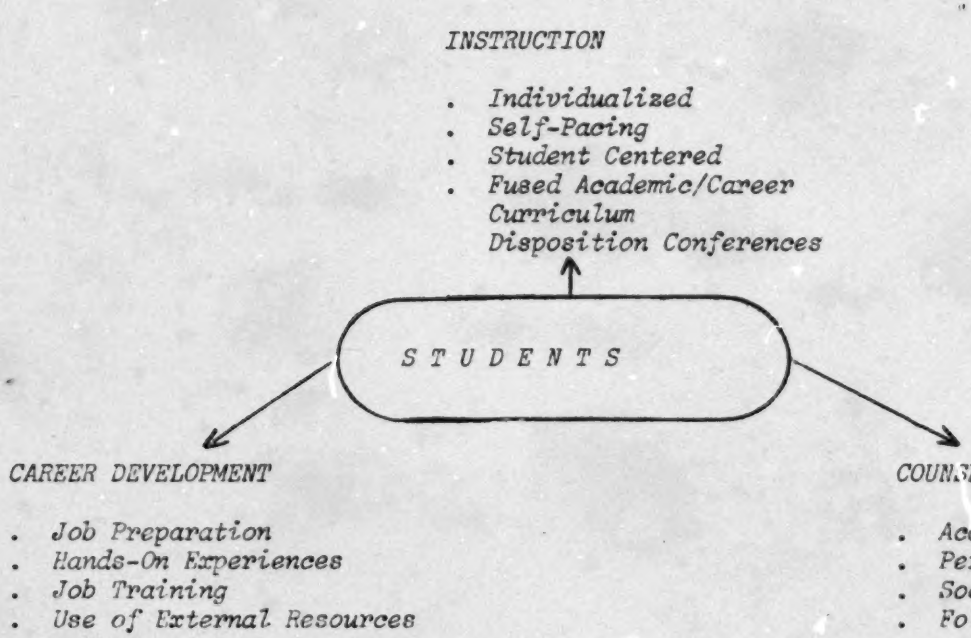

EXHIBIT A

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

UCEC is housed in two large renovated buildings formerly used by an industrial enterprise, and located in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. Students are recruited from area senior high schools and must meet the following criteria for admission:

- Poor attendance at their former school
- Problems adjusting in their former school
- No major disciplinary record
- At least a fifth grade reading level
- Social and economic family problems

These students were classified as potential dropouts in their former schools, and many are recruited from the dropout rolls of public schools.

There are approximately 185 students who are attending the program. These students are processed by UCEC staff through testing, prior school records and oral assessments. The results of this processing will identify the learning experiences and activities that students will be provided with to satisfy their needs and interests.

The major educational program elements are designed into the following phases which make-up a 22 week semester:[2]

Phase One (I)

Phase I covers the first ten weeks of the semester and includes two days of orientation for students. Phase I attempts to aid students in achieving the following objectives:

- Investigation and reporting various careers

2 The semester schedule at UCEC runs from September to February (first semester) and from February to July (second semester). Each semester is equal to a full school term.

- *Developing skills in problem-solving*
- *Completing various employment forms*
- *Learning how disciplines relate to their career interests*
- *Learning how specialist and scholars work within their vocations*
- *Increasing their knowledge level in basic academic subject matter*
- *Learning how to perform successfully on emplcyment examinations*

The major thrust of this phase is orientating students to UCEC, diagnosing students strengths and potential problems in academic and personal areas, and exposing students to a variety of career information.

Phase Two (II)

Phase II covers the last twelve weeks of the semester and includes basic classroom instructional activities and career exploratory ("hands-on") field experiences. In Phase II the curricula consists of individualized learning units in each of the major disciplines. These learning units present fused academic and career content and are designed for self-pacing and self-appraisal. Hands-on or field experiences are also built into Phase II. This activity provides students with opportunities to observe and engage in practical career experiences that relate to careers they wish to pursue.

Phase Three (III)

Phase III deals primarily with advanced or specialized experiences for students in their career interests. The time span for this phase is fluid and based upon the needs of students. On-the-job training, skills training, or preparation for college admission are all part of the activities that take place in this phase.

SPECIAL FEATURES OF UCEC

There are a number of program features at UCEC that makes it unique among most public or private schools in terms of its capability to help potential dropout and dropout students to become productive individuals. These features are described below.

External Resources

External resources are used extensively at UCEC to support students in their career activities, academic development and personal growth. Counselors utilize various social service agencies to assist students with medical, child care, financial and other personal problems. Job Developers utilize businesses and industries for student field experiences, and job placement. Instructors utilize career specialists for classroom enrichment activities and demonstrations.

Disposition Conferences

Weekly student disposition sessions are held jointly by instructors, job developers and counselors. At these sessions all developmental and growth aspects of a given set of students is discussed and analyzed. Recommendations and suggestions are made regarding how the student can be assisted. In this process all students are peiodically assessed by the staff.

Curriculum

The curriculum at UCEC consists of career information and activities integrated with academics. These learning units are individualized and self-pacing. They are reinforced and supported by other teacher made or commercial materials. Students move through curricula activities based on their abilities and needs.

Hands-On Experiences

These are practical or field experiences that students have related to careers they wish to pursue. These experiences take place in banks, markets, clothing shops, schools, radio stations, community agencies, industries, etc.

Career Development Plan

This plan is a written document or blueprint covering all of the students' high school experiences, activities, needs, aspirations and evaluations. The plan is developed collectively by staff members parents of the student and the student.

Assessment Conferences

These conferences take place two to three times a semester after formal written evaluations are made for the student. Each student is scheduled for an individual conference which includes his parents, instructional advisor, counselor, and job developer. The purpose of these conferences is to discuss in depth the progress made by the student.

UCEC Advisory Board

The Advisory Board consists of leaders in the business, industry and educational community who through their experiences, expertise and influence, provide supportive services to the total UCEC program.

SUMMARY

While there are literally hundreds of career educational programs and projects operating in school districts across the United States, very few career alternative high schools are operating outside traditional school districts. With OIC being the central administrative structure, UCEC is indeed a unique experiment in education.

It is yet too early to measure the overall impact the UCEC center has had on its students, however some successes have been demonstrated. For example, most students at UCEC have been "written off" by the educational establishment and in some instances by parents. Nevertheless, prior to attending UCEC the student population who entered the school in September, 1973 as a group had an average daily attendance of less than 20% at their former schools. Their average daily attendance at the end of their first year at UCEC was over 60%.

An analysis of student records will reflect concrete evidence that a direct relationship exists between school attendance and achievement. While most of these students were low achievers at their former schools, they showed a high level of academic and personal growth at UCEC. While part of this achievement can be contributed to the fact that students enjoy being part of an innovative school and therefore put more effort into their work, the dominant factor seems to be that the students enjoy the class and personal attention they receive from the UCEC staff. Each student is identified and cared for as a person and not a number.

Peer group pressure is also a motivating force among students. Many students observe their friends who were non-attenders and low-achievers at their former schools making significant progress at UCEC, and in turn they try harder to achieve themselves.

Many experimental and innovative educational programs have been born and have died due to a variety of internal and external problems. Hopefully UCEC will escape these pitfalls. It seems now that UCEC is moving toward achieving both purpose and promise.